

**COLUMBIA EMPLOYMENT & TRAINING CENTER  
COLUMBIA, MARYLAND**

**One-Stop Profile**

**June 1996**

**Based on a Site Visit Conducted During March 1996**

# **COLUMBIA EMPLOYMENT & TRAINING CENTER**

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### **One-Stop Profile**

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## **COLUMBIA EMPLOYMENT & TRAINING CENTER COLUMBIA, MARYLAND One-Stop Profile**

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### **DESCRIPTION OF THE LOCAL CONTEXT**

The “Columbia Employment & Training Center” (“Center”) is located in a small strip mall in the town of Columbia. It is part of the “Mid-Maryland SDA,” a two-county SDA that includes neighboring Carroll County. Columbia is a “planned” suburban community, originally designed to be a place that people “go to to get away from.” For the most part, it is a bedroom community; the majority of its residents commute outside the area for employment. Although much has changed since the late 1940’s when the community was planned, it is still a fairly affluent area, with a low unemployment rate relative to the remainder of the state.

According to the primary local partners, the Center’s relatively new status as a state-recognized “One-Stop/CareerNet Center” represents a logical extension of years of working cooperatively and collaboratively, and continual movement towards an emerging vision of co-located services within a well-defined workforce development network. Partners believe that the vision of the Center incorporates fundamental cultural change—from “come in and we’ll help you” to “come in and we’ll help you help yourself.” This is consistent with the state’s One-Stop vision, which incorporates personal empowerment and individual decision-making supported by the provision of high-quality information and services delivered chiefly through the use of automation and technology. Ideally, local One-Stop players would like the Center to be the hub of workforce development services in Howard County. It is hoped that the One-Stop/CareerNet initiative will be the catalyst for increased coordination among numerous entities, activities, and initiatives.

Several factors are influencing the context within which the local One-Stop/CareerNet vision is emerging and taking shape. Contextual variables that have significantly impacted local One-Stop design, implementation, and progress include: (1) the local demographics; (2) status as a One-Stop pilot site; and (3) a dynamic political and organizational context. Each is briefly described below.

- *The demographics of Howard County have precipitated a local One-Stop approach that is responsive to the needs of the local community, with an emphasis on services to the transitionally unemployed. The majority of*

Howard County residents are well-educated and employed in professional and technical occupations. The Center has evolved based on the needs of the local community. Hence, although the Center offers services to targeted populations both on-site and through referral, the overwhelming majority of Center customers are unemployed adults who need assistance transitioning from one job to another.

- *The Center is one of the first two One-Stop pilot sites in Maryland. This has significantly enhanced local efforts.* Having received an ES Revitalization grant in the fall of 1994 to create a “Resource Area” for individual customers, the Center was in an ideal position to become a local One-Stop pilot. Local respondents believed that being a pilot site was a “luxury” that afforded them numerous opportunities, including the chance to try out new equipment, system features, and processes. Moreover, being directly involved in statewide One-Stop design and implementation and, in general, “having the state’s ear” were cited as both fortuitous and beneficial.
- *The dynamic context within which One-Stop is emerging offers many challenges. There is much “in limbo”—from budget crunches to personnel changes to organizational issues to welfare reform.* For example, as of 10/1/96, the state agency responsible for the JOBS program will no longer be jointly administering the program with the state agency responsible for JTPA. Therefore, the local JTPA entity will no longer be the presumptive deliverer of JOBS services. Even the local DSS manager was not certain to what extent the SDA would be involved in the delivery of services for JOBS clients. Additionally, the co-location of JTPA and Job Service staff within the Center represents a challenge in hard fiscal times because the JTPA entity currently leases space at the Center, although it could occupy free county space in another location. Moreover, there are several personnel changes that have taken place throughout the SDA. Indeed, shortly after the One-Stop site visit, due to budget cutbacks, the county-level JTPA Supervisor—a key One-Stop actor—was laid off.

Finally, it is important to note that the Howard County Employment & Training Center has only been “operational” since late October, 1995. Many activities, services and processes were still being conceptualized at the time of the site visit.

#### **ORGANIZATION AND GOVERNANCE OF THE LOCAL ONE-STOP INITIATIVE**

Consistent with state requirements, a *Local Planning & Management Team* was formed to guide One-Stop implementation and progress in the Mid-Maryland SDA. As required by the state, the Local Team includes representation from the Private Industry Council, the SDA Director, the Job Service manager, a representative of the local community college, and an additional employer. Because the SDA consists of two

counties, however, membership on the Local Team had to be “doubled” in some cases. For instance, a representative from Howard County Community College is a part of the Local Team, as is a representative from Carroll County Community College.

Despite formal status as an SDA-wide formal governing body, in actuality, there are two Local Planning and Management Teams: one that guides One-Stop progress in Howard County, and one that guides One-Stop progress in Carroll County. Partners believe this to be a necessary arrangement due to the differences between the counties, including different county governments, different demographics and, for some funding streams, largely independent workforce delivery systems.

Within Howard County, there are four primary partners involved in the local One-Stop initiative. Thus, the Local Team includes one more entity than is required by the state.

- The JTPA unit in Howard County;
- The local Job Service and Unemployment Insurance (which are co-located and jointly managed);
- The Howard County Community College; and
- The “Business Resource Center” of the local Economic Development Authority.

JTPA and Job Service staff are co-located at the Center. There is a strong history of cooperation between the two entities, which have been physically located within the same strip mall since 1994, and co-located in the Center’s present integrated facility within the strip mall for the past year. Day-to-day management and operation of the Center is the responsibility of both partners, although responsibility for the *CareerNet* equipment resides with the Job Service, the entity initially located in the present facility.

The Howard County Community College (HCCC) and the Business Resource Center (BRC) are both housed in a nearby county facility. There is a strong historical relationship between JTPA and the HCCC. As a major JTPA contractor, the college currently administers various components of the JOBS program (e.g., job readiness skills).

The BRC is a private, non-profit entity established as part of the local Economic Development Authority nearly one year ago. Its primary purpose is to leverage economic development resources and coordinate business-related activities that may be provided by various entities, including the Small Business Development Center (affiliated with the U.S.

Small Business Administration) and the Service Corps of Retired Executives (SCORE). Local respondents from various entities believed that the BRC represented an essential “piece” of the local One-Stop initiative—the business perspective.

Although respondents believe that increasing the number of partner entities on the Local Team would be beneficial, the recent operational status of the Center, in addition to other numerous priorities, mitigates against this at the present time. However, two additional entities are currently involved in Howard County’s One-Stop initiative as “coordinating partners”:

- The local Department of Social Services (DSS); and
- Careerscope, which is a private, non-profit entity providing customized on-site workshops for JTPA customers.

Local respondents believe that all partners operate in a “synergistic” fashion and “plug into” the resources of one another. For example, through its relationship with the Center, the BRC is able to offer relocating businesses access to skilled workers. BRC also provides various services either directly or through referral, including business counseling and entrepreneurship training, which is a primary training area for the Center’s customers.

In addition, partners believe that including the local DSS as a coordinating partner is indicative of the county’s proactive approach toward impending welfare reform. A locally-designed welfare reform program—called *Jobs First*—was initiated 1/1/96 and is fortuitously consistent with the statewide plans for welfare reform. Local partners believe that the One-Stop/*CareerNet* system will support welfare reform efforts by providing individuals with high-quality information and services to assist them in negotiating speedier labor force attachment.

Partner entities caution that the Center is “just beginning.” Plans for further refinement and expansion of the local system include, for example, the establishment of “Career Information Centers” within the HCCC and the BRC over the next year. (Part of the state’s conceptual framework for One-Stop includes a network of supplementary sites from which *CareerNet* will be accessible.) Key local respondents also envision other agencies and entities outstationing staff at the Center on a periodic basis. At the present time, for instance, staff of the HCCC are at the Center once a week to provide on-site ABE and GED classes. Similarly, Careerscope staff spend much of their time at the Center providing job search and other workshops.

In summary, the organization of the One-Stop initiative in Howard County is characterized by: (1) a collaborative and cooperative network built around a state-recognized One-Stop/*CareerNet* Center that houses two key partner agencies and whose primary customer base is the transitionally unemployed; (2) two additional key partners co-located with each other, but in a separate facility; (3) the inclusion of a local economic development component to incorporate the business perspective; (4) a strong emphasis on referral arrangements among primary and coordinating partners; and (5) the desire to increase coordination and cooperative arrangements among additional community and public programs/initiatives.

### **COMMUNICATION AND COORDINATION**

Although local One-Stop players perceive the establishment of formal communication and coordination mechanisms as crucial to future One-Stop progress, plans for structured mechanisms are not yet planned or in place due to the newly operational status of the Center and the local One-Stop system. As the Center continues through its “operational” phase, it is envisioned that there will be opportunities to enhance communication and coordination, including cross-training and regularly scheduled meetings among partner agency staff.

Currently, local partners have the opportunity to interact through regular PIC Board meetings. Additional opportunities to interact are offered by meetings related to the local welfare reform initiative, which involves many of the same agencies involved in the One-Stop initiative. There are also frequent and informal communications among the Center’s JTPA Supervisor and other partner entities by virtue of contractual and other relationships. For instance, because JTPA is a key provider of JOBS services, the JTPA Supervisor regularly interacts with the local DSS Director. This also involves the local community college, as the primary training vendor for JTPA services. Moreover, the JTPA Supervisor regularly attends weekly meetings of the local Economic Development Authority to keep abreast of ways in which the Center can be responsive to the business community. Furthermore, the co-location of ES and JTPA facilitates communication between supervisors of the two partners, so that ES is regularly kept informed of interactions with other players. JTPA, therefore, effectively serves as the center of an informal communications network through which partners are kept informed of activities related to the local One-Stop and other initiatives. Although this arrangement is currently satisfactory, an over-reliance on personal relationships may make the system vulnerable in the event of staff turnover.

## **FUNDING ARRANGEMENTS, BUDGETING AND FISCAL ISSUES**

In addition to a 1994 ES Revitalization grant of \$75,000, a \$21,000 One-Stop planning grant, and the distribution of *CareerNet* hardware and software, the local One-Stop initiative is supported primarily by the distinct operational budgets of partner agencies. Although partners coordinate in terms of the planning and delivery of specific services (e.g., workshops), there is presently no consolidation or integration of funding, which is perceived as prohibitive in the current environment of multiple funding streams and requirements.

The physical Center facility is supported by two separate leases held by the JTPA entity and the ES/UI entity. The status of “county property” and “state property” is both omnipresent and frustrating for local staff, who perceive the “separation due to finances” as contrary to the One-Stop concept. Thus, the JTPA partner has a lease for space at the Center with the county and the building owner; the ES/UI partner has a lease with the state and building owner. Similarly, all of JTPA’s supplies are county property and are ordered separately from ES/UI; JTPA staff have their own copy machine, as does the Job Service staff.

There are currently no written financial agreements between the two co-located partner agencies. Financial “arrangements” are informal and verbal in nature, primarily due to funding restrictions and the difficulty of mingling in any way “county” and “state” funds. For similar reasons, there are no jointly-funded projects. Indeed, funding requirements and restrictions that effectively preclude joint expenditures due to the complexity involved are perceived as both frustrating and constrictive, especially in a One-Stop context. Local One-Stop actors expressed a need to be both creative and resourceful within current requirements but found the level of effort this required to be unsettling. By way of example, the inability to purchase paint to enhance part of the facility was so problematic due to “bureaucratic red tape” that local staff used personal funds and time to purchase supplies and paint part of the Center. Because of its less restrictive requirements, Wagner-Peyser funds were cited as “a great plug for the peculiarities of other programs,” affording partners some “financial wiggle room.” (For instance, a copy machine used by Center participants is paid for with ES funds, regardless of the participant’s program eligibility.) ES respondents at both the state and local levels did not believe that this “benefit” of Wagner-Peyser funds to the One-Stop effort was sufficiently recognized nationally.



Although block grants are perceived as potentially facilitative of integration efforts (e.g., by minimizing “turf” issues), local respondents are also wary that the reduced funding associated with block grants may mean streamlining programs to the point of lowered effectiveness—concerns echoed at the state level as well. Regardless of the future, respondents believed that the state’s One-Stop/*CareerNet* vision, and the local variant, would provide a supportive philosophy and delivery framework for whatever workforce development legislation is eventually passed.

## **DESIGN OF THE LOCAL ONE-STOP INITIATIVE**

### **Evolution and General Description of Local Design**

The primary catalyst for reengineered services and service delivery mechanisms in Howard County was the ES Revitalization initiative. In the fall of 1994, the local Job Service received a \$75,000 ES Revitalization grant to create a “resource area” within its facility that would include an array of labor market information and related materials, in addition to a computer work area for use by self-directed customers. Shortly thereafter, staff of the Howard County JTPA unit relocated into space adjacent to the Job Service. Soon after these developments, the state of Maryland received a One-Stop implementation grant.

The site in Columbia was selected as a One-Stop pilot because it was clearly “ahead of the curve”—two primary partners were co-located there, and reengineering efforts were already significantly underway. Clearly, things “happened very quickly” in Howard County, with local players having input into the statewide One-Stop initiative from its inception. Indeed, various levels of Center staff felt that the statewide effort *started* in Howard County, accounting for a strong sense of pride among staff. Both JTPA and ES/UI staff believed that ES Revitalization was a “revolution.” The state’s One-Stop initiative—*CareerNet*—added to it.

The design of the local One-Stop/*CareerNet* initiative is predicated upon existing systems, consistent with the statewide tenet of system *reform*, as opposed to the establishment of new systems. Thus, according to a key local respondent, local design can be expressed as follows: “We combined our programs and kept what was working, and we supplement it with *CareerNet* information.” In addition, local One-Stop actors believed that the state-developed One-Stop/*CareerNet* system afforded partners the latitude necessary to incorporate additional features, such as locally-designed workshops tailored to customer needs. The local One-Stop conceptual framework also incorporates the “inverted pyramid”

service delivery paradigm—consistent with the state’s conceptual framework—whereby the majority of services are delivered through automation and the self-directed use of computer technology. The incorporation of this paradigm within the local vision and design framework makes sense to local One-Stop actors. According to the JTPA Supervisor, “The majority of [Center] customers don’t really need one-on-one [assistance].” Because Howard County residents are typically “high-tech and highly paid,” local players have created a One-Stop center that “...speaks to the needs of those people.”

### **Relevance of the Local Design to the Four Federal Goals**

#### **Universal Access**

Local One-Stop actors expect the federal goal of *Universal Access* to be achieved through the development of a workforce development network that includes a number of components, some of which are in early stages of development and implementation. For example, partners believe the Center will come to be viewed as a professional entity dedicated to comprehensive and high-quality information and services for individuals and employers where no stigma is attached, similar to public libraries. In addition, various services (or information about services) are or will be accessible within a local network that includes a One-Stop/*CareerNet* Center, two additional Career Information Centers hosted by the Howard County Community College and the Business Resource Center that will also permit access to *CareerNet* hardware and software, as well as other sites that will relate to the Center through detailed articulation and referral agreements (e.g., local DSS offices). Furthermore, in accordance with the state’s plans, remote access to labor market and related information by organizations and home users is expected to be available by the end of the implementation grant period.

At present, individuals eligible for specific programs have access to a full range of services that can be accessed at the Center (e.g., workshops), off-site (e.g., community college or Business Resource Center classes), or both. Individuals not eligible for particular programs can access information and various career exploration, assessment, and other services offered through the *CareerNet* computer terminals at the Center.<sup>1</sup> The inability to allow “general public” customers to access more intensive services due to program requirements and/or the unavailability of “slots” was not perceived as

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<sup>1</sup> Although the state’s intention is to offer completely unrestricted access to *CareerNet* core services, at the time of the site visit, local staff thought they were supposed to require formal Job Service registration of all system users.

problematic, probably because of the magnitude of services and information that are, or are planned to be, offered on-line through *CareerNet*.

One particular challenge that has emerged with respect to the achievement of this federal objective is the lack of public transportation in Howard County. At the time of the site visit, the County Executive had created a "Transportation Committee." The Center is currently planned to be a stop on the first route of the new transportation system that will be developed.

### **Customer Choice**

Individuals can presently access information and services by visiting the Center. It is also expected that, by November 1996, individuals and employers will be able to dial in and receive the same high-quality, up-to-date information currently offered at the Center. Thus, a local (and state) priority for this year of the implementation period includes various forms of remote access to facilitate the achievement of the federal goal of *Customer Choice*. This includes the planned establishment of the Howard County Community College and the Business Resource Center as state-recognized "Career Information Centers" that offer *CareerNet* services and information.

In addition, for individuals who may be uncomfortable using the self-service technologies, staff assistance is available at the Center from "Resource Area Specialists." This is a new job classification for individuals that specifically assist customers in accessing self-directed information and other resources.

### **Integrated Services**

The automated *CareerNet* system offers high-quality, integrated core services to all system users, irrespective of their eligibility for categorical programs. Beyond these core services, the achievement of the federal objective of *Integrated Services* is currently predicated upon generally informal cooperation and coordination among primary and other partner entities. Customers eligible for categorical programs are referred to the partner entity best suited to provide needed services. For instance, within the Center there are appropriate "hand-offs" from ES/UI to JTPA if someone is in need of training. Similarly, job-ready JOBS customers or customers of the local Department of Rehabilitation Services (DORS) are referred to the Center for job search and similar types of assistance.

It is clear that partners place a premium on the *coordination* of services in order to achieve the local One-Stop vision of service design and delivery. The only example of true

“integration,” however, was the local planning process, which included a host of local players that developed the local *CareerNet* planning document. Local respondents did not perceive the lack of fully integrated services as problematic. Indeed, increasing the level of coordination through various means and processes was cited as a viable goal, especially given the recent status of the facility as a state-sanctioned One-Stop/*CareerNet* Center. In addition, consistent with the state’s conceptual framework, coordination through a “no-wrong door” or “multi-service center” approach is a clear option for local areas.

### **Performance-Driven/Outcome-Based**

Local respondents expressed a need for a *Performance-Driven* and *Outcome-Based* One-Stop system that incorporates outcome, process, and customer satisfaction measures and believed that changes in measurement systems should be “driven by what is important at the local level...” It was believed that current systems, despite differences in requirements and reporting mechanisms, are overly “numbers-driven” and “steeped in such minutiae.” One key respondent stated that a One-Stop performance measurement system should ideally capture *system-level* accomplishments. This respondent presented a metaphorical view of the current conflict, stating that the One-Stop vision of performance measurement should relate to “teaching a man to fish...” The current system was more akin to “telling us to measure how much you caught,” however.

In general, aside from performance and accountability measures currently required under distinct programs, local efforts in this area are in their infancy. This is not surprising, considering that the statewide One-Stop/*CareerNet* system has only recently become operational in several sites, including the facility in Columbia. Thus, local respondents echoed state-level respondents in their contention that it was too soon to delve into complicated performance measurement issues in a system that is just beginning, when practical operational matters as pressing as minimizing system downtime require immediate attention. In addition, in keeping with a statewide system that was developed centrally, local respondents are waiting for further state action in this area.

As described below, however, performance-related activities to further One-Stop progress and continuous improvement efforts are taking place. Although these activities are intended to support local efforts, they are also intended to inform statewide efforts in general. These include *CareerNet* performance reports, efforts to measure customer utilization, as well as some efforts to measure customer satisfaction.

*CareerNet* performance reports are local reports compiled by Center staff that are transmitted weekly to the state. These reports include specific data on the *CareerNet* system, including downtime, areas of difficulty, and related information. This current procedure is intended to support the state's efforts to continuously improve upon a system still being developed. The Center is also compiling *CareerNet* utilization numbers using customer "rating cards." Although there are plans for an on-line rating system, the current system employs the use of manual rating cards that each customer is expected to complete; these are periodically transmitted to the state. Therefore, this is a means to gather information on usage, as well as general information on how customers felt about using the system.

There are also some local efforts to measure customer satisfaction using surveys. However, these efforts are program- and activity-specific. There are currently no "Center" surveys or similar efforts to measure customers' overall experience. Key local respondents at the Center believed it would be difficult and misleading to use "Center" surveys because hardware and software difficulties are presently a consistent part of daily operations. It is believed that this factor would negatively skew any "Center" survey results. Indeed, respondents believed this also mitigated against the possibility of using current performance for benchmarking purposes.

### **Physical Facilities**

The integrated Center occupies one of four units located in a strip mall. From left to right, there is a space leased by JTPA that partners refer to as the "End Unit." To its right is a convenience store, followed by the actual Center itself, and a restaurant is located on the far right of the mall. Thus, the two co-located partners—JTPA and ES/UI—lease two of the spaces in the strip mall, which are separated by a convenience store.

Current facilities are clearly the product of years of changes and negotiations. The local Job Service moved to what is now the Center "proper" in 1992. In 1994, JTPA staff moved into the End Unit. When the space adjacent to the Job Service facility became available in early 1995, JTPA staff relocated there without relinquishing the lease for the End Unit. Both partners agree that the best-case scenario would be occupying the entire strip mall, although this is probably unlikely. (JTPA also has the first option to lease the space now occupied by the restaurant, should the owners decide not to renew.)

The *End Unit* is the smallest portion of the strip mall and is currently used for a variety of classes and workshops. It conveniently has its own entrance so that classes can

be held in the evening without disruption to the Center's office space. Howard County Community College, for instance, uses the space for ABE and GED classes two nights per week; Careerscope also uses this space for job search and related workshops. The End Unit also contains a bank of computer terminals used during classes and cubicle-style office space for staff from "visiting" entities. Presently, Careerscope staff use this space because of their frequency at the Center. Local respondents also envision this space being used by staff outsourced from other agencies (e.g., DSS, DORS).

The *Center* itself is the largest part of the strip mall. There is one entrance for individuals that opens into a reception area staffed by both a JTPA employee and a Job Service employee. A key feature of the Center is the "Resource Area," originally developed using ES Revitalization funds. This area contains two telephones for participant usage (with plans for a fax machine), 6 *CareerNet* terminals that deliver the automated core service package, and 10 separate computer terminals that can be used by individual customers to prepare resumes or fulfill other word processing needs. There is also a variety of printed labor market information, including publications, journals, magazines, newspapers, current books, and similar reference tools. "Resource Area Specialists" are located near the Resource Area to readily assist customers.

The Center also contains a large open area with desks in which individuals can fill out forms or simply sit and read the newspaper, an ALEX/Self-Registration area containing a bank of 8 terminals, and a small nearby area for Job Service orientations, which are delivered through video presentation every half hour. There is also one large classroom used for meetings and workshops that can be subdivided into two rooms using a sliding wall. However, respondents mentioned "competing" for use of this limited space. Around the perimeter of the facility are staff offices, which are attractive and use modular furniture. Staff offices for JTPA employment counselors are somewhat different, however, with much higher walls to afford a greater level of privacy.

The reengineering of existing space to accommodate partners' needs in a One-Stop environment has been challenging. Rather than work "from the ground up" to create a facility, state and local One-Stop actors worked with what they had. Although perhaps lower in cost, this strategy necessitates a response to seemingly mundane but frustrating and formidable tasks, such as arranging an attractive and customer-responsive facility around existing water pipes. In addition, because JTPA staff relocated to the present facility subsequent to ES/UI staff, JTPA staff are located "on the right side" of the facility, and

ES/UI staff are located “on the left side” of the facility, fostering a sense of “separateness” that individual customers in a focus group clearly recognized. However, despite the challenges and difficulties that have arisen with respect to relocating agency personnel and altering physical facilities, it is clear that staff and other respondents are thoroughly proud of the Center. Staff expressed that “We brainstormed this place!.... This was *our* idea.”

## **IMPLEMENTATION OF LOCAL SUPPORT MECHANISMS**

### **Staffing Arrangements**

Partner entities not co-located at the Columbia site generally relate to the One-Stop initiative through a key staffperson who serves as a liaison and conduit of information. For example, in the case of the Howard County Community College, a Director in the Office of Continuing Education is the primary One-Stop liaison. In the case of the local Department of Social Services, the Assistant Director is the primary liaison. Although this arrangement is currently satisfactory, in order for the One-Stop/*CareerNet* initiative and the cultural change it represents to be “institutionalized,” it is likely that additional staff from partner entities will need to be more directly involved in the future. The establishment of formal communication and coordination mechanisms will probably assist in this regard.

As previously indicated, staffing arrangements at the Center itself are such that ES/UI (state) employees are on one “side” of the facility, and JTPA (county) employees are on the other “side.” Although not intentional, staff perform different functions so that a “functional integration” type of staffing arrangement—in which staff are situated based on function and not agency affiliation—would not eliminate the separation. Indeed, *because* staff performed clearly different functions, the differences in the personnel policies of the two partners (e.g., county employees have more holidays) was not perceived as problematic. Staff agreed, however, that if they were to become more “generalists” and involved in similar functions, different personnel policies might become an issue.

In the year since staff have been co-located at the present facility, attitudes have changed, fears have been assuaged, and the “we” and “they” perception has dissipated. Initially, there was an understandable degree of trepidation among both partners when JTPA staff first co-located there. The fact that staff already knew each other was helpful, as were initial joint meetings that involved all staff. Care was also taken to make JTPA staff feel “at home.” For instance, it was perceived as important for JTPA staff to have their own door to the facility, as well as higher cubicle walls to afford a greater level of privacy during counseling sessions. There was also a high level of staff involvement in

daily planning and operations. And, for their “first Christmas together,” staff from both partner entities adopted a Howard County family. These many instances of “making the effort” were perceived by staff as crucial. Presently, it is clear that there is a strong sense of ownership and pride where the Center is concerned and an unequivocal belief among staff that One-Stop is the wave of the future.

### **Capacity Building**

In general, capacity building efforts supportive of the local One-Stop initiative are understood in the context of the state’s training institute, the Maryland Institute for Employment & Training Professionals (MIETP), which is conveniently located less than two miles from the Center. Because MIETP provides a variety of workshops—both in general areas and areas specifically related to the statewide One-Stop initiative—local actors have not felt the need to devote time and resources to develop internal training at this time. Staff from the Center can readily access MIETP’s workshops. Indeed, curricula related to the statewide One-Stop/*CareerNet* initiative were developed, in part, based upon the experience of the Center as a pilot site. Although it appears that ES/UI and JTPA staff have been directly involved in organized capacity building efforts, staff from other partner entities have not.

Additional capacity building efforts that involve the two co-located partners include joint staff meetings that appear to have engendered a strong sense of involvement and commitment among staff (although formalized meetings have been discontinued due to other priorities); internal training on the “front desk” and the responsibilities of the two receptionists; as well as training on the Center’s “Resource Area.” It is clear that key respondents from the two partners value capacity building and training for all levels of staff. However, the newness of the One-Stop/*CareerNet* initiative in addition to other pressing priorities have had all levels of staff otherwise occupied. As a result, local desires (including retreats and the like) have necessarily taken a back seat at the present time.

### **Management Information Systems (MIS)**

There are currently no locally-designed or initiated MIS projects, although there are extensive plans in various developmental stages at the state level. These include, for instance, automated/integrated intake and the establishment of an comprehensive participant tracking system. Local respondents were clearly supportive of statewide efforts and enthusiastic about future prospects. It is possible that the Center’s status as a One-Stop



pilot site—which affords local actors access to information in addition to a high level of involvement—accounts, at least in part, for the high degree of satisfaction and support.

### **Labor Market Information and Related Information Technology Improvements**

Notwithstanding the Center’s “Resource Area,” which contains a variety of materials in print and electronic format initially developed as part of the ES Revitalization initiative, efforts in this area are clearly driven by the state’s One-Stop efforts. One-Stop/*CareerNet* is an expansive state-developed system that delivers a core set of services using computer technology. The delivery of high-quality labor market and related information is at its essence. This includes career exploration information (e.g., through the state’s Career Information Delivery system, called *Career Visions*), self-assessment and skill inventory software, information on training and educational programs, and more. Furthermore, despite system downtime, “bugs,” and related frustration, all levels of local staff (in addition to Center customers) were quite impressed with the system’s current and planned capabilities.

### **Marketing**

Local efforts in this area are in various stages of conceptualization. Few specific activities or projects have been undertaken, however. Considering the relative newness of the facility as a state-recognized One-Stop/*CareerNet* Center, this is not surprising. Indeed, although all levels of staff wanted to “show the world” what had been accomplished to date, there was also recognition that marketing a system still being refined was premature. As remarked by one key local respondent, “We’re comfortable with waiting right now. We want the system to be almost foolproof, although we recognize it won’t be perfect.” These perceptions are similar to those echoed by state-level respondents.

Local One-Stop actors expect the state to establish a system-wide marketing campaign at a more timely juncture in statewide One-Stop implementation. Respondents were comfortable with supplementing statewide efforts with locally-initiated efforts. Plans include newspaper and local cable station advertising, in addition to a media-covered grand opening event. Although local players are anxious, the marketing that takes place as a result of partners’ normal business operations is perceived as reasonably satisfactory at this time. For example, the Business Resource Center conducts its own marketing that incorporates the Center’s resources and identifies access to skilled labor as benefits for

employers. Similarly, the local PIC has a marketing committee for the JTPA program in the Mid-Maryland SDA, which has also been helpful.

The most significant challenge in this area is currently the lack of signage for the Center. Thus, although the need to postpone broader marketing efforts is acknowledged, local respondents expressed frustration regarding the lack of signage. Whereas state plans include large plexiglass signage with the *CareerNet* logo, it had not been received at the time of the site visit. Current signage relates to the local Job Service, which was located at the site initially. At present, there is nothing to identify the JTPA entity's presence at the Center. The only identifier signifying the Center as a site for various workforce development needs is the state-developed "*CareerNet* logo," a "sticker" that is affixed to the glass window in the front of the building. However, it is unlikely that customers are as yet familiar with this statewide logo. Indeed, individual customers participating in a focus group discussion specifically cited the lack of signage as unsettling. Employees of the Center concurred. Finally, there is still discussion regarding a *name* for the Center. Although this Profile references the "Columbia Employment & Training Center," that identification is for the purposes of convenience only.

## **DELIVERY OF ONE-STOP SERVICES TO CUSTOMERS**

### **Services for Individual Customers**

The Columbia site offers a range of on-site services to individual customers, generally those customers who are job ready and seeking employment. The Center itself is devoted almost exclusively to job search using predominantly a "self-directed computer-based approach" that has been developed at the state level. Indeed, the local design is predicated upon individuals conducting their own job search at their own pace, with staff assistance as needed. The majority of individuals visit the Center to file for unemployment insurance benefits. Typical customer flow then includes a video-based Job Service orientation, meeting with Job Service staff, registering on-line with "ALEX" and, if in need of training, customers are "handed off" to JTPA staff for eligibility determination, assessment, and service planning.

Because the One-Stop/*CareerNet* system in Maryland is state-developed and directed, services to individual customers are best understood within the context of the state's conceptual framework and One-Stop design. The state of Maryland envisions four levels of service: (1) *The Career Information Service Level*, which involves remote access to high-quality labor market and career information; (2) *The Core Service Level*, which is the heart

of the *CareerNet* system, as described below; (3) *The Integrated Intake Level*, which is currently the least developed; and (4) *The Enhanced Service Level*, which is expected to vary across the state but which, at a minimum, includes computer tutorials, ABE packages, and similar software.

The “Core Service Level” is available to all customers regardless of program eligibility. It represents a combination of on-line customer services described in terms of four “clusters” that are in a continuous state of evolution and refinement. In addition, staff dedicated to assisting customers in accessing on-line information and services are present at all times.

- *The Automated Personal Access Cluster* involves a single automated record for each customer so that individuals using the *CareerNet* system need only input basic information once.
- *The Job Finding Cluster* currently includes several levels of on-line services to enable individuals to look for and secure a job. It includes ALEX, Job Search Assistance through computer-assisted learning, and other labor exchange services (which are expanded with local workshops as described below).
- *The Career Exploration Cluster* currently includes information on careers, demands and qualifications, occupations suited to individual skills, interests, abilities, etc. There is also a user-friendly automated self-assessment component and a computerized skill inventory feature to enable individual customers to plan appropriate career, employment, and learning plans. *CareerNet Visions*, the state’s Career Information Delivery System, is also a component of this cluster.
- *The Customer Development Cluster* enables individuals to obtain and print out information on education and training opportunities in the state and local area, as well as financial and other support (e.g., PELL and loan programs). Information on certain eligibility requirements, costs, and graduate earnings is also included.

Local areas are encouraged to expand upon the Core Service Level by, for instance, offering workshops as part of the “Enhanced Service Level.” Indeed, this is the primary way in which the Columbia site has expanded upon the state’s minimum required services. There are presently a variety of locally-designed on-site workshops that are offered by different partner entities. For instance, Careerscope provides a broad range of job search-related workshops generally for JTPA participants (typically Title III-eligible dislocated workers). If slots are available, ES/UI participants can also attend. Customized workshops include: “Personal Empowerment,” “Researching the Job Market,” “Coping with Job

Loss,” “Networking,” and “Advanced Interviewing.” Careerscope staff also facilitate a “Job Club” at the Center, which is called the “Employment Circle.”

Job Service staff also conduct “Early Intervention Workshops” as part of local UI Profiling efforts. (Although this workshop is required of UI profilees, it is open to all Center customers.) In addition, the Business Resource Center offers on-site workshops for individuals interested in starting their own business (e.g., franchising) and, as stated earlier, the Howard County Community College offers evening classes at the Center and is the primary vendor of classroom training services.

### **Services for Employer Customers**

Consistent with the state’s One-Stop design, core services for employers are expected to be delivered chiefly through automation and the use of sophisticated computer technology through the “Employer Cluster” portion of the “Core Service Level.” However, employer services are a second-year priority for the state. Plans include remote access to a broad range of labor market information to be phased in based upon employer priorities ascertained through statewide employer surveys, including employer access to suppressed applicant files, legislative and regulatory information (e.g., pertaining to WARN or ADA), and a statewide “calendars of events.”

In addition to on-line information and services that are planned, the local One-Stop system currently offers a range of recruitment and outplacement services that can be accessed through any of the four primary partner entities, as well as more intensive services available through the Howard County Community College and the Business Resource Center of the local Economic Development Authority. Both partners offer a range of employer services, including business planning, business counseling, employer seminars, customized training, and relocation information and assistance. Although partners endeavor to coordinate employer referrals, a single integrated system of employer contacts (e.g., using a single account representative system) has not yet been developed.

## **CUSTOMER RESPONSE**

### **Individuals**

A focus group discussion was held with individuals participating in the Center’s Job Club, which is called “The Employment Circle.” Individuals were predominantly JTPA Title III participants who were generally well-experienced and highly educated. Overall, participants thought that the services and the service delivery framework represented a

significant and positive departure from “traditional” services and service delivery—a “good investment of taxpayer dollars.”

Participants’ general view of the Center was captured by one middle-aged gentleman who was the former Vice President of Human Resources for a medium-sized company that recently moved out of state. In his former position, he was thoroughly acquainted with outplacement services and agencies. However, costs were typically high, and the services only short-term. His perception that, “This is the mirror image of an outplacement program that *continues*” was strongly reiterated by others in the focus group.

Individuals specifically noted many benefits that the Center offered. For example, several participants discussed the importance of having case managers, who are called “counselors.” (Once considered eligible for Title III, each individual is assigned a counselor who works one-on-one with a customer based on a “50-minute hour.”) It was believed that having “someone you can talk to” was generally important, but was absolutely crucial for those individuals laid off after several years of “secure” and well-paying employment.

Other stated benefits included access to a variety of training programs (“I was pleasantly surprised when I looked at the types of training skills that are offered.”); access to the latest on-line job search technologies, such as job search via the Internet, as well as other technologies (“These guys are really where they need to be!” And, from another participant, “They’re ahead of the curve based on what I’ve seen.”); having a variety of resources in one location (“I don’t have to go to four different offices and deal with the job search and the training and the UI. It’s boom. It’s right here.”); facilities that were attractive and more professional than “traditional” government offices (“The facilities here are much nicer. In [other areas] you felt like you took your life into your hands.”); greater awareness of area resources (“I’m aware more of things in the community. I heard about the Business Womens’ Network and joined that.”); and “practical” workshops and information that included the Employment Circle (“This is a great service because, in the past, when I’ve attended career types of things...I don’t think a lot of the classes had a realistic approach to them. It was a lot of theory.”)

Although participants had a lot of praise for the “new system,” there were criticisms as well. For example, several disapproving comments pertained to the Center’s lack of clear signage. One individual stated, for instance, “It says something to you when there’s

no clear signage.” Another mentioned that, “You have to think of this more like a retail operation and you’re providing a product.”

An additional area that drew criticism was related to negative first impressions based upon what was perceived to be disorganized entry procedures and confusion over the services individuals could use. Several participants remarked that they “couldn’t get a straight answer unless [they] registered [with the Job Service],” although the *CareerNet* system is intended to be accessible by anyone. Participants were under the impression that they “had to” go through the Job Service in order to receive any Center services. One individual added that, “Everyone here is under the assumption that if you need one side, you need the other. I needed the training side, but I don’t need the employment side.” (It was interesting that focus group participants clearly detected two distinct “sides” of the building, noting clear “cultural differences” between ES/UI and JTPA staff that extended beyond what participants referred to as obvious “county culture” and “state culture.”)

Finally, it was not surprising that individuals perceived the slowness and downtime of the *CareerNet* system to be frustrating. This particular complaint, however, appeared to be taken more in stride. Participants appeared to demonstrate a level of “understanding” regarding the new system that did not extend to other areas.

Generally, participants believed that most of their less-than-positive experiences had to do with the “newness” of the Center—the arrangement itself, as well as the technology. They clearly believed that “things are improving,” and were supportive of what the local area was attempting to do, noting that it was “still better than [the] government services” with which they were familiar. Indeed, participants had a variety of feasible suggestions for the Center, including rotating receptionist staff and having a Center “greeter.” All in all, participants certainly saw a bright future for the Center and believed it was worthwhile for them and for the community.

### **Employers**

As mentioned earlier, employer services delivered through the newly operational One-Stop/*CareerNet* system are a focus for the second year of the implementation period. Therefore, the One-Stop site visit did not incorporate employer focus groups or similar modalities of inquiry. However, separate discussions with the current Chair and Vice-Chair of the PIC, representatives of two area employers, offered both insight and perspective. Comments on the current and planned One-Stop/*CareerNet* system were overwhelmingly positive. In particular, the importance the state clearly placed on employer

input was perceived as paramount in designing a state-of-the-art technological system intended to support the employer community. What has been accomplished thus far was perceived as “a great beginning.”

Each representative believed “getting the right kinds of people” were primary concerns of employers. The Center (and others like it) was perceived as a necessary response to a system perceived as less than adequate. “One-Stop” is clearly what the future holds, including the emphasis on technology. The One-Stop/*CareerNet* system will allow individuals to enter personal/professional data into a system that can be accessed from an employer’s office. “Already one step is eliminated. It will save time, which means money.” Both employer representatives noted the importance of “seamless” employer services and service delivery and that “having everyone here makes it better.... It’s speed, it’s accuracy, and it’s streamlining.” It was believed that the Center’s arrangement appealed to the “bottom line” of businesses, particularly in the case of recent downsizings and the need for outplacement services.

Although the technology was perceived as particularly impressive, and although both representatives believed that the focus on technology and electronic access was necessary and prudent, it was also emphatically voiced that that should not be misinterpreted as “human touch” is unnecessary. Indeed, it was believed that human interaction was crucial. One representative, who is the Senior Vice President of a local bank, stated, for instance, “We have on-line services at our bank, but we’ve yet to get a loan on-line. People will do *everything* on-line but not a loan. Technology is there, but they won’t use it.” In other words, with respect to some needs in particular, people want “touch and feel.” Neither individual saw the current or planned system conflicting with this in any way.

### **INFLUENCES ON LOCAL DESIGN**

In addition to the key factors mentioned earlier in this Profile—local demographics, status of the Center as a One-Stop pilot, and a rapidly changing political and organizational landscape—there are additional factors that have impacted One-Stop design and implementation in Howard County. ES Revitalization has been a distinct influence on local One-Stop design, as intimated earlier. This federal-level initiative is, in fact, the precursor for both state efforts and local efforts in Columbia, establishing a baseline for future reengineering efforts that were later supported by the One-Stop grant. The state’s well-articulated vision, with its emphasis on technology and clear parameters established for local areas, has been an additional influence on local One-Stop design and implementation.

Local respondents from various entities believed the state's vision and efforts to be both ambitious and praiseworthy, noting that *clarity of purpose* facilitated local efforts.

Relationships among partner entities has also impacted local efforts and progress in positive ways. The strong history between specific partner agencies such as the community college and the JTPA entity have facilitated local efforts and increased coordination, despite the lack of formalized coordination mechanisms. Moreover, the addition of an economic development component to the local One-Stop initiative has incorporated the business perspective and is likely to support future implementation and progress. The inclusion of the local Department of Social Services as a coordinating partner is also meaningful. Although perhaps not a significant local influence at this time, it is likely that this inclusion and the positive relationship with the local DSS will decidedly impact local efforts when the state entity responsible for the JOBS program takes back full reins of the program later this year, and as welfare reform becomes a legislative reality.

#### **ASSESSMENT AND LESSONS LEARNED**

The site in Columbia has made forward strides in creating a One-Stop Center and network in a relatively short period of time that offers responsive and comprehensive services clearly targeted to the demographics of the local population. It is particularly well-suited to providing job search and related services and activities for individuals who are job-ready. The Center itself is clearly part of a local network that is supported by historical relationships and referral arrangements with a broad range of partners and entities.

The local One-Stop system exemplifies aspects of different One-Stop delivery models. For users of the automated *CareerNet* information system, the Center represents fully integrated One-Stop core services. For users of enhanced services available from ES, UI, JTPA and JOBS, the local system exemplifies coordinated services among co-located partners. For local partners not physically co-located at the *CareerNet* Center (i.e., the community college and Business Resource Center), the Center exemplifies a no-wrong-door approach, with articulated referral arrangements and coordinated local planning. As these partners begin to support electronic linkages to the *CareerNet* information network, they will become more active partners in the delivery of One-Stop services.

Because the site had been operational for less than five months at the time of the site visit, many activities and processes were still in various stages of development or conceptualization. As various respondents stated, "We're just beginning." Thus, the local system is clearly in a normative stage of development with much happening, seemingly all



at once. What can be said at this time is that it is uncertain to what extent the tenuous nature of the JTPA leasing arrangement will impact further plans and progress, or to what extent the potentially destabilizing effect of numerous changes taking place will have on emerging efforts. Moreover, although it was reiterated that “individual players are key,” the reliance on specific individuals may be more of a short-term facilitator than a long-term solution. Although the establishment of a system through cultural change efforts is surely strengthened by strong relationships among individuals, there will be a growing need to institutionalize the cultural change that is intended across agencies and partners. Despite the current state of flux, it is likely that the experiences in Howard County will offer both insight and lessons for the emerging national One-Stop system.